

**WARM MEMORIES GREET
THE REOPENING OF 2 HISTORIC
SITES IN EL PASO**

good company
by Mary Margaret Davis
EPT 7/2/81



El Paso doesn't have to manufacture history and historic sites; we have both in abundance.

What we lack, it seems, is awareness. Then, upon gaining that awareness, we need more people who will fight and work and spend to preserve and promote what we have.

At last weekend's rededication ceremonies of the Martin Building and the Magoffin Home, there were smiles on the faces of some of the fighters, workers and spenders as they remembered how narrowly those two treasures escaped being swept into the dust bin of memory.

* * *

For Martin Building owner Maury Kemp, it was a day of personal triumph. He has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to update his structure at Mills and North Stanton and restore the exterior to its clean lines of 1917 "Chicago-style" architecture.

Kemp has his own memories of the Martin building: As a youngster, the he was often in the lobby, hawking the Saturday Evening Post from a canvas bag slung over his shoulder. The newsstand owner there chased him away several times a day but Kemp persevered because, he said, "the most im-

portant people in town did business in that building."

When the previous owner, El Paso Electric Co., decided to relocate and put the building on the market, Kemp bought it to house his myriad interests and other tenants. He announced plans to redo it in a first-class manner.

That he succeeded—admirably—was demonstrated to friends and history buffs at Sunday's open house.

Only one suite remains available for rent and it was in that as-yet undivided space that old-timers and newcomers mingled, nibbling canapes and toasting the renovation.

"This very space was my father's office suite." Sara McKnight told me. She attended with her mother, Elise Stevens, widow of Dr. B.F. Stevens, and Sara's husband, Frank, art historian and preservationist.

Centerpiece in the reception room is a larger-than-life bronze Indian sculpture by Lincoln Fox, "The Day of Eagle," one of only seven that were cast. (Another is in the Smithsonian Institution). The board room features paintings from a series of birds of prey by Lois Carson, and the wood-carved wild birds of Bill Zalesak—all especially commissioned for the renovation. Kemp's office is highlighted by a Tom Lea painting, and the celebrated artist himself, with wife Sarah, was among guests.

Highly appreciative of the restoration were Berte Haigh, who came from Midland with wife Caroline, and newcomers Chris and Alex Murray, thriving here as transplants from San Antonio. W.J. McDuffee accepted compliments for starting the Downtown architectural beautification with his Mutual Savings Building at Texas and Kansas. At-

tending with her mother, Pauline Sanders, was Amy Sanders Jennings, assistant director of the Phoenix Art Museum; who visited with old friends, Kemp's wife Jean and Jim and Ruthie Brennand.

Historical society president Gertrude "Sugar" Goodman not only presided at the ceremony but served as doorman throughout the afternoon. Society host chairmen for the party were Mary Ann Dodson and Sandra Hoover. For tour guides, they recruited Mary Ann's son Charles Dodson, Maury's nieces Allyson and Elaine Hibler and Sandra's nieces Sandra and Sharon Prestridge.

Tours took visitors from top to bottom of the building. In the cement basement floor, the rails on which coal cars were moved to and from the building's furnace are still exposed. Several pieces of beautiful greenish-black marble—the original flooring on the first and basement levels—had been broken over the years. But, happily, job contractors recalled (and were able to resurrect) some identical marble, taken from the recent remodeling of a nearby building, making a perfect match for replacement. Stone to reface the building's facade came from the same quarry from which the original stone came in 1917.

Lined up at the curb outside the Martin building were cars belonging to members of the El Paso Horseless Carriage Club. A foursome of late arriving guests were steered to one shiny relic—a 1930 deluxe club coupe Ford Model A—by one of their group, a husband who spotted the car and whooped: "I had one just like that!"

Helping Maury and 4 Centuries 81 official historian W.H. Timmons unveil the Texas Historical Commission medallion on the building's face was Florence Cathcart Melby, the gentle fighter who worked for more

than a year to compile building history for the commission.

* * *

Janice Windle, who was executive director of El Paso's 1976 Bicentennial celebration, recalled that one of the goals of the Bicentennial planners was the preservation of the century-old Magoffin Home as a public museum site.

For awhile, that goal appeared impossible because it would require a cooperative purchase by the state of Texas and the city of El Paso. Such co-mingling of funds from those governing bodies was absolutely forbidden by law, Mrs. Windle and the celebration committee was told.

"I told my husband (attorney Wayne Windle) that we just couldn't let the house go without a fight, and that we'd need a good lawyer," she said.

Of course, Wayne volunteered to help. With a deadline facing them, the Windles burned the midnight oil, poring over the law books, until they found—at the last possible minute—legislation permitting the mixing of such funds specifically for Bicentennial celebration purposes.

Armed with the statutes, they quelled opposition to the purchase. Today, in what turned out to be the first such acquisition, the home is owned jointly by the state and city. It is maintained and operated by the state as a historic site under the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

I became aware only recently of the work being done at the Magoffin Home, but I know that for more than a year, two people spent almost every waking hour there, overseeing the first phase of the master plan de-

signed to restore the old adobe home. Because staffs are assigned to state historic sites on the basis of geographical area involved, the Magoffin staff consists only of park superintendent June Secrist and park ranger Eric Brown (with a third person assigned only days before the opening). For June and Eric, it was more than a job; it was a labor of love.

At 26, Ms. Secrist is a restoration and preservation scholar. The San Antonio native has lost her heart to El Paso and regrets that our town with far more to tout than her hometown—loses much to the wrecking ball and fails to glorify those sites still standing.

Alderman Orlando Fonseca, who grew up in the shadow of the Magoffin home, recalled for the audience his memories of playing games on the home's grounds.

Historical society hosts for the ceremony were Margaret Mathis, Janet Brockmoller and Louise Edwards.

* * *